

These pages are cut and pasted from [the CU ten-part course](#). They are not intended to be taken whole, but only to be used as a source, if required, of stimulus and talking points supporting the original texts that are given.

Rules of Debate and Procedure of Meetings

Hannington, 1950

The book is dedicated to making it possible for anyone to attend meetings without feeling left out, put down, or patronised. It strongly opposes the use of the chair in a patronising way towards the members of the meeting.

The book provides the weapons by which the ordinary members of a meeting are able to intervene and assert themselves in all necessary ways, so as to guide the chairperson, as much as to be guided by the chairperson.

The Chairperson is the main servant of the meeting, and not the boss of the meeting, says Hannington.

One of the common complaints of feminists who would flee from structure, is that formal meetings are oppressive. They can be, but the remedy is not structurelessness. The remedy is to see how the structure can work, and is well designed to work, in a way that promotes fairness and democracy.

What is oppressive about meetings arises from ignorance of the procedure and of the rules of debate.

Women's Charter

On 17 April 1954, fourteen months before the [Freedom Charter](#) was adopted in Kliptown on 16 June 1955, the Federation of South African Women adopted the Women's Charter.

Echoing Zetkin, [Kollontai](#), Luxemburg, and [Lenin](#), the Women's Charter says:

"We women do not form a society separate from the men. There is only one society, and it is made up of both women and men. As women we share the problems and anxieties of our men, and join hands with them to remove social evils and obstacles to progress."

The Women's Charter was not directed against men; nor did it hold out women as a separate class of people as compared to the men. It opposed such a separation. It placed the question of women in the mainstream, and it went on to say:

"It is our intention to carry out a nation-wide programme of education that will bring home to the men and women of all national groups the realisation that freedom cannot be won for any one section or for the people as a whole as long as we women are kept in bondage."

On the question of forms of organisation of women, the Women's Charter says, among other things, that it is *"For the removal of all laws that restrict free movement, that prevent or hinder the right of free association and activity in democratic organisations, and the right to participate in the work of these organisations."*

In 1982, Cheryl Walker commented about the pressures that bore down on the FSAW:

"There were two alternatives. Either the FSAW could seek its own mass membership or it could base itself on a federal form, acquiring its members indirectly through each of its affiliated member organisations. The matter was not settled at the inaugural conference. A draft constitution proposing the first alternative – a mass, individual membership – was circulated but failed to win overall approval. Ray Alexander, and later the NEC based in Cape Town, supported this constitution, but Ida Mtwana and, it would seem, the ANCWL in the Transvaal, wanted a federal structure."

"... The ANC was adamant on the issue and finally, reluctantly, the individual membership group yielded towards the end of 1954. They conceded not because they had been convinced by the other group's arguments but because they realised that without the support of the ANC, the women's movement would be isolated from the Congress Alliance."

Freedom Charter

The Freedom Charter was adopted by five organisations (SACOD, SAIC, SACPO, SACTU and the ANC) in the Congress of the People on June 26th 1966, one and a half years after the adoption of the Women's Charter, seven years after the formation of the ANC Women's League, and twelve years after the admission of women to membership of the ANC in 1943. Without the prior admission of women to the ANC, the Freedom Charter would have been unimaginable, or else it would rightly have been taken as a fraud.

Without mass organisation of the women in the ANC Women's League and in the Federation of South African Women (FEDSAW), the Freedom Charter would hardly have been possible.

What does the Freedom Charter say about women in particular?

- *that only a democratic state, based on the will of all the people, can secure to all their birthright without distinction of colour, race, sex or belief;*
- *Every man and woman shall have the right to vote for and to stand as a candidate for all bodies which make laws;*
- *The rights of the people shall be the same, regardless of race, colour or sex;*
- *Men and women of all races shall receive equal pay for equal work;*

The Freedom Charter does not mention Gender or Patriarchy, or advocate Structurelessness. The Women's Charter of 1954 also does not mention these things.

Progressive Women?

We have asked: Is the Progressive Women's Movement (PWM) supposed to be a subsidiary of the ANC Women's League, and therefore a junior partner of the ANC? Or is the PWM a wider movement, open to all women, of which the ANCWL is only one part among many? To what extent have the problems and tensions of the FEDSAW period in the 1950s been solved? Or, have those problems not been solved?

The PWM has a Base Document, a PWM Founding Document, and the PWM Declaration of 8 August 2006, from the founding gathering in Mangaung. All three documents were downloaded by the CU from a PWM page at the ANCWL web site. There was later a separate PWM web site, at <http://pwmsa.org/>. On this new PWM web site, it says, among other things:

"The Progressive Women's Movement of South Africa (PWMSA) is a Not-for-Profit Organisation registration number 051-728-NPO, launched in Bloemfontein on the 8th August 2006 to coincide with the 50th Anniversary of the 1956 march of 20 000 South African Women to the Union Buildings to protest against apartheid."

But it does not say that the 1956 march was organised by FSAW.

The [PWM Base Document](#) says, among other things:

“The ANC and the ANC WL... have held a view that there is a need for some kind of an organic structure that will take up broader issues of women in the South African Society.

“In October 2005 during one of its meetings the National Executive Committee of the Women's League decided it would be ideal if South African women to formalize a Progressive Women's Movement in 2006.

“After extensive discussions, as the ANCWL and Alliance partners we have agreed that a Women's Movement is a broad front of women's organisations, grassroots organisations of all kinds, feminist oriented groups, researchers, faith based organisations, traditional healers, women involved in policy formulation and programmes.

*“**Character** of the PWM: Organic - not a formal structure*

*“**Objectives:** Unite the women of South Africa in diversity; strengthen the relationship between the government and women's organisations.”*

The Base Document therefore confirms that the PWM is an ANC initiative, that it is a combination of women's organisations, not individuals, that it shall be “organic” and “not a formal structure”, and that its purpose is to bind the women to the government.

The [PWM Foundation Document](#) says, among other things:

*“**National Steering Committee, Selection and Tenure:** National Conference shall identify sectors for representation to the steering committee. After the Conference of the PWMSA the previous committee in conjunction with the newly seconded members will convene a handing over meeting within a period of a month.”*

[Steering Committee members are “identified” and “seconded”. The word “elect”, or “election”, is never used. Terms are five years (National) and three years (Provincial).]

*“**Powers and Duties of the National Steering Committee:** The Steering Committee shall elect a **Convenor** and assign portfolios and responsibilities to the members of the Steering Committee; They shall carry out and monitor the decisions of the National Conference; They shall coordinate the establishment of Provincial Steering Committees”*

*“**Committees:** There shall be such other Committee(s) and ad hoc committees, as the Steering Committee may from time to time deem necessary; Each Committee shall have a **Coordinator**.*

*“At any **National Conference** the only business that shall be discussed shall be that which has been specified in the written request lodged by the members concerned, unless the Steering Committee in her discretion otherwise permits.*

*“The **Steering Committee** shall have the power to authorise expenditure on behalf of the Movement from time to time... Each member shall, on an annual basis pay dues for every five years.”*

It appears that in order to be “*organic and not a formal structure*”, the PWM has to be at least as tightly structured as any other body. There is a Convenor and there are Co-ordinators, instead of Presidents, Chairpersons or Secretaries. But the basis of delegation to conferences is not spelled out. There is selection and secondment, but no elections.

Umsebenzi Online on Women

2006 was the year when the CU did its first “No Woman, No Revolution” series, from February to May of that year, meeting at the Women’s Jail, Constitution Hill. August 2006 was when we saw the launch of the “Progressive Woman’s Movement”, something different and opposite in character from what the Communist University had imagined was needed.

Here are some speculative theses on the question of women in South Africa:

- Women, as such, have no interests that are antagonistic to those of men, but women have a common and particular felt experience among themselves, as women, of the oppression that capitalism has brought to their lives.
- Therefore there is a basis for working women to organise as a mass, by which is meant a small or large number of people who feel a common disadvantage in society, and who in consequence organise themselves together for their collective good.
- Women’s mass organisations have the same requirement as trade unions and political-vanguard organisations, to be both democratic and centralist. Therefore women’s organisations should have individual membership and branches, hold periodic national congresses, have corporate personality, and have a constitution to ensure democracy.
- The SACP, as a vanguard political organisation of the working class, is designed to relate to such mass organisations, just as it relates to trade union organisations, and others.
- As a matter of historical fact, the ANC, through the ANCWL, has on at least four successive occasions since its founding in 1948, acted to ensure that the above kind of democratic, mass, individual-membership general-purpose women’s movement could **not** flourish. The ANCWL, under pressure from the ANC, blighted FEDSAW, the UDF women’s structures, and the Women’s National Coalition, and it now blights the Progressive Women’s Movement.
- The ANC adopted “non-sexism” in the 1980s, and the current South African Constitution is non-sexist, but in practice these provisions mean little as compared

to the material non-existence of a mass women's movement that has membership and democracy, and which is politically aligned to the working class and to the cause of socialism.

- Very little of the above is discussed in the general public realm. What discussion there may be is often based on unexamined common-sense bourgeois-feminist, eclectic and post-modernist precepts. Yet gains have been made. One was the election, in December 2007 at Polokwane, of an ANC National Executive Committee of 84 members of which 50% are women.
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Tyranny of Structurelessness

As she tells us at the beginning, the first version of Jo Freeman's "Tyranny of Structurelessness" was given as a talk more than 40 years ago, in 1970.

Part of its appeal is that it states "the obvious" – things that those of us with even a small amount of experience know very well to be true. For example:

"...there is no such thing as a structureless group."

Not only is this "obvious", but it is also part of scientific knowledge of human society. Humans are social creatures, and live their lives in relation with each other. These relationships always have structure, although the structure of the relationships is constantly changing.

If, as Spinoza and Engels thought, freedom is "the recognition of necessity", then freedom of relationships, and within relationships, will be greater if their structure is acknowledged, and not denied.

If, as Gramsci thought, all social groups contain their "organic intellectuals", then some of these may be good and others bad. But the remedy for bad intellectuals is not to pretend that there are no intellectuals. They are there, whether people are conscious of them, or not.

What Jo Freeman shows is that "structurelessness", as applied in the Women's Movement, became a screen behind which women who had advantages of class privilege, derived from the generally class-divided society outside, were able to manipulate the other, poorer and working-class women, so as to preserve their hegemony or dictatorship within these feminist circles.

"For everyone to have the opportunity to be involved in a given group and to participate in its activities the structure must be explicit, not implicit," says Freeman.

Explicit structure means open Rules of Debate, Procedure of Meetings (a.k.a. “Standing Orders”) including notice of meetings, a Constitution, listed membership, minutes, book-keeping, and election of leadership on a periodical basis.

In South Africa, a “Progressive Women’s Movement” (PWM) exists which has no formal structure. Its “Base Document” (not a constitution) says that it is “Organic – not a formal structure”. In practice this means that its decisions are taken in a hidden way by its sponsors, who fund its principal gatherings (so far two in six years) and who maintain it from outside itself, which is done by the ANC Women’s League.

The first section of Jo Freeman’s essay, called “Formal and Informal Structures”, is the best of it. It “says it all”. Organisation is essential for the working-class women, and for the working class in general. Organise or starve! is a good slogan.

What Jo Freeman said, addressing the Women’s Movement forty years or more ago, today remains applicable to all of our activities, and not just to the Women’s Movement.

“Structurelessness” has nothing to do with feminism, and everything to do with degenerate “post-modern”, anti-humanist bourgeois philosophy in the service of Imperialism.

Socialist Victory Only With Proletarian Woman

[Clara Zetkin’s](#) speech at the Party Congress of the Social Democratic Party of Germany at Gotha on 16 October 1896 sets the theme which will provide the backbone of this ten-part course.

Says Zetkin:

“The granting of political equality to women does not change the actual balance of power. The proletarian woman ends up in the proletarian, the bourgeois woman in the bourgeois camp. We must not let ourselves be fooled by Socialist trends in the bourgeois women’s movement which last only as long as bourgeois women feel oppressed.”

“We must not conduct special women’s propaganda, but Socialist agitation among women.”

Zetkin continues:

“Therefore the liberation struggle of the proletarian woman cannot be similar to the struggle that the bourgeois woman wages against the male of her class. On the contrary, it must be a joint struggle with the male of her class against the entire

class of capitalists. She does not need to fight against the men of her class in order to tear down the barriers which have been raised against her participation in the free competition of the market place. Capitalism's need to exploit and the development of the modern mode of production totally relieves her of having to fight such a struggle. On the contrary, new barriers need to be erected against the exploitation of the proletarian woman. Her rights as wife and mother need to be restored and permanently secured. Her final aim is not the free competition with the man, but the achievement of the political rule of the proletariat. The proletarian woman fights hand in hand with the man of her class against capitalist society. To be sure, she also agrees with the demands of the bourgeois women's movement, but she regards the fulfilment of these demands simply as a means to enable that movement to enter the battle, equipped with the same weapons, alongside the proletariat."

The German Social Democratic Party was the leading centre of this kind of thinking from before the death of Marx until the Russian Revolution in 1917. Clara Zetkin was its principal leader in this field and by 1896 had been editor of **Die Gleichheit** ("equality") for five years.

Socialism impossible without the women

If we do not draw women into public activity, into the militia, into political life; if we do not tear women away from the deadening atmosphere of household and kitchen; then it is impossible to secure real freedom, it is impossible even to build democracy, let alone socialism.

[Lenin, Third Letter from Afar, Zurich, March 1917](#)

The above quote from Lenin [pictured, speaking in the open air in the revolutionary year of 1917] expresses as clearly as can be the full meaning of our series title: **"No Woman, No Revolution"**.

Yet it was not democracy "in general" of which Lenin wrote. Democracy is an instrument of class struggle, and can never be a substitute for class struggle.

The following words were written by Lenin for the second anniversary of the Great October Revolution (and are included in the downloadable document linked below):

"Let the liars and hypocrites, the dull-witted and blind, the bourgeois and their supporters hoodwink the people with talk about freedom in general, about equality in general, about democracy in general.

"We say to the workers and peasants: Tear the masks from the faces of these liars, open the eyes of these blind ones. Ask them:

“Equality between what sex and what other sex?

“Between what nation and what other nation?

“Between what class and what other class?

“Freedom from what yoke, or from the yoke of what class? Freedom for what class?”

“Down with the liars who are talking of freedom and equality for all, while there is an oppressed sex, while there are oppressor classes, while there is private ownership of capital, of shares, while there are the well-fed with their surplus of bread who keep the hungry in bondage. Not freedom for all, not equality for all, but a fight against the oppressors and exploiters, the abolition of every possibility of oppression and exploitation-that is our slogan!

“Freedom and equality for the oppressed sex!

“Freedom and equality for the workers, for the toiling peasants!

“A fight against the oppressors, a fight against the capitalists, a fight against the profiteering kulaks!

“That is our fighting slogan, that is our proletarian truth, the truth of the struggle against capital, the truth which we flung in the face of the world of capital with its honeyed, hypocritical, pompous phrases about freedom and equality in general, about freedom and equality for all.

Lenin, Soviet Power and the Status of Women, November 1919

In September of that year (1919) there was already a “Fourth Moscow City Conference Of Non-Party Working Women”, that was addressed by Lenin (and also by Trotsky).

When Lenin wrote in 1917 - between the two revolutions of that year, and before he had returned to Russia - that “it is impossible even to build democracy, let alone socialism” without the women, he also prefigured the National Democratic Revolution altogether, with the clear implication that democratic class struggle is a prerequisite of socialism.

Lenin repeats the “No Woman, No Revolution” message:

The proletariat cannot achieve complete freedom, unless it achieves complete freedom for women.

Lenin, To the Working Women, February 1920

No Woman Question?

The proletarian revolution is inconceivable without the involvement of the more than 50% of the population which is female. Bourgeois feminism cannot lead women towards proletarian revolution. Resolution of the contradictions that oppress women cannot be achieved under capitalism. These are the general and compelling circumstance that motivates this course, No Woman, No Revolution.

[Alexandra Kollontai](#) understood the limits of bourgeois feminism very well. In 1908 she wrote:

“The [bourgeois] feminists seek equality in the framework of the existing class society, in no way do they attack the basis of this society.”

“Where, then, is that general ‘woman question’? Where is that unity of tasks and aspirations about which the feminists have so much to say? A sober glance at reality shows that such unity does not and cannot exist,” wrote Kollontai.

“The feminists declare themselves to be on the side of social reform, and some of them even say they are in favour of socialism — in the far distant future, of course — but they are not intending to struggle in the ranks of the working class for the realisation of these aims. The best of them believe, with a naive sincerity, that once the deputies’ seats are within their reach they will be able to cure the social sores which have in their view developed because men, with their inherent egoism, have been masters of the situation. However good the intentions of individual groups of feminists towards the proletariat, whenever the question of class struggle has been posed they have left the battlefield in a fright. They find that they do not wish to interfere in alien causes, and prefer to retire to their bourgeois liberalism which is so comfortably familiar,” says Kollontai.

Kollontai was writing at the time of the “[Suffragette](#)” campaigns for votes for women in capitalist countries, which votes [hardly existed](#) at the time. Kollontai published her pamphlet “[The Social Basis of the Woman Question](#)” in 1909.

Kollontai saw two camps. In one camp were the feminists, who from Kollontai’s point of view were bourgeois feminists by definition. In the other camp were women who were proletarian, or else partisans of the proletariat. She distinguished between these two camps as follows:

“However apparently radical the demands of the feminists, one must not lose sight of the fact that the feminists cannot, on account of their class position, fight for that fundamental transformation of the contemporary economic and social structure of society without which the liberation of women cannot be complete.

“If in certain circumstances the short-term tasks of women of all classes coincide, the final aims of the two camps, which in the long term determine the direction of

the movement and the tactics to be used, differ sharply. While for the feminists the achievement of equal rights with men in the framework of the contemporary capitalist world represents a sufficiently concrete end in itself, equal rights at the present time are, for the proletarian women, only a means of advancing the struggle against the economic slavery of the working class. The feminists see men as the main enemy, for men have unjustly seized all rights and privileges for themselves, leaving women only chains and duties. For them a victory is won when a prerogative previously enjoyed exclusively by the male sex is conceded to the 'fair sex'.

"Proletarian women have a different attitude. They do not see men as the enemy and the oppressor; on the contrary, they think of men as their comrades, who share with them the drudgery of the daily round and fight with them for a better future. The woman and her male comrade are enslaved by the same social conditions; the same hated chains of capitalism oppress their will and deprive them of the joys and charms of life. It is true that several specific aspects of the contemporary system lie with double weight upon women, as it is also true that the conditions of hired labour sometimes turn working women into competitors and rivals to men. But in these unfavourable situations, the working class knows who is guilty."

"The working woman is first and foremost a member of the working class."

Rosa Luxemburg on Women

Rosa Luxemburg brings her exceptional powers of expression to bear upon the topic that she rarely covered, and in the process leaves no doubt that she was nevertheless fully aware of everything that was at stake.

The question "Why are there no organizations for working women?" is still the most crucial one in South Africa now, as much as it was in the Germany of 1889 or 1912.

Luxemburg is scathing about the feminists: *"Most of those bourgeois women who act like lionesses in the struggle against 'male prerogatives' would trot like docile lambs in the camp of conservative and clerical reaction if they had suffrage. Indeed, they would certainly be a good deal more reactionary than the male part of their class,"* she writes.

Luxemburg knows both the purpose, and the limits, of democracy: *"Fighting for women's suffrage, we will also hasten the coming of the hour when the present society falls in ruins under the hammer strokes of the revolutionary proletariat,"* she concludes.

The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State

Karl Marx's working life was dedicated to the restoration of humanity to itself. This was the motivation for his greatest work, "Capital". Marx regarded the relation between men and women to be the essence of humanity. He never wrote a book about it, but in his papers at the time of his death in 1883 were the notes that his friend Engels quickly turned into "[The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State](#)". And this book turns out to be, not only original, but indispensable.

August Bebel's book "Woman and Socialism" came out five years earlier, in 1879, but it is not a satisfactory starting point. Engels' "Origin of the Family" on the other hand, has constant relevance. It describes women's place in society in the complete context of the origin of property, class struggle, and the instrument that defends property and dominates class struggle: The State.

The special contribution of "The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State" is that it shows the common, interdependent origin of private property and the State; the fall of the women into the oppressive condition which they subsequently continued to suffer; and the institutions of money, writing and law. This original, revolutionary break marked the end of pre-history and the beginning of history, which as Marx and Engels had noted at the beginning of the Communist Manifesto of 1848, was from that time on "a history of class struggles".

The transition from prehistoric communism took place a long time ago in some parts of the world. In Egypt and Mesopotamia (Iraq) it may have happened more than five thousand years ago. In most other parts it was a much more recent phenomenon, and in some places the fall of the women may in some ways still not yet be complete.

The simultaneous nature of the triple catastrophe (property, state and downfall of women) means that the remedy in all three matters will likewise have to be simultaneous, meaning also that the urgent abolition or "withering away" of the State is a woman's issue. The socialist project is a woman's project.

Communism is a necessity for women. The reversal of the downfall of the women can only be achieved by the simultaneous abolition of property and the State. Likewise, the abolition of property and the State cannot be achieved without the conscious restoration of women to their proper place in human society. All three goals have to be achieved together. The three goals are actually the same goal, and the name of it is communism.

There is no liberation available to working women under capitalism. Communism is where the contradictions will be resolved.